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Title Page

Article submitted for publication in the *e-journal of Asian linguistics language teaching*

ISSN 1445-0992

Article Title

Pursuing an "export culture" through the teaching of Asian languages in Australian schools - the gap between theory, practice and policy prescription.

Submitted by

Dr Deborah Henderson
Lecturer
School Cultural and Language Studies in Education
Faculty of Education
Queensland University of Technology
Kelvin Grove Campus, Victoria Park Road,
Kelvin Grove, Q 4059.

Phone: 07 3864 3048
dj.henderson@qut.edu.au

Pursuing an "export culture" through the teaching of Asian languages in Australian schools - the gap between theory, practice and policy prescription.

> *Australia requires an export culture which is "Asia literate": ie. one which possesses the range of linguistic and cultural competencies required by Australians to operate effectively at different levels in their various dealings with the region - as individuals, organisations and as a nation.*
> *(Rudd 1994, ii).*

Abstract

In February 1994, the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed a report it commissioned in December 1992 on a policy prescription for the study of Asian Languages and Cultures in Australian schools. The acceptance of this report, *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future* (1994), referred to as the Rudd Report after the Chair of the Working Group, was significant. It offered a 15-year plan that aimed to produce an Asia-literate generation fluent and familiar with "export" Asian languages and cultures. In particular, students would have the opportunity to commence the study of one of four priority “export” Asian languages, namely, Korean, Japanese, Indonesian, and Chinese, in primary school. However, the Rudd Report’s emphasis on prioritising Asian languages for utilitarian reasons was opposed by those who advocated the study of European languages. This paper examines some of the assumptions about second language acquisition that the Rudd Report made and argues that greater emphasis should have been placed on addressing those theoretical and pedagogical issues significant to LOTE teaching in Australia.

First, this paper sets its examination of the Rudd Report's policy prescription for the acquisition of "export" Asian languages in the context of the debates about methodologies for second language teaching in Australia. Second, it explores the assumptions the Report made about second language acquisition and contends that COAG's objective to prioritise Asian languages was not sufficiently informed by theories of second language acquisition. Third, it critiques the Report's push for an export culture in terms of its policy prescription for second language provision.

Communicative competence in theory

At the time of the COAG commission, existing practice for LOTE teaching in Australia was informed by the theory of communicative competence. The Rudd Report subsequently noted that a key influence on second language curriculum was the Australian Language Levels (ALL) Guidelines, produced in 1984. Although erratically adopted, these guidelines gave "considerable impetus to the promotion of the communicative approach to language teaching" (Rudd 1994, 93). The ALL Guidelines formed the basis for the development of the National Project Curriculum materials in Asian languages, such as Japanese, Chinese, Indonesian, Korean, Thai and Vietnamese. As Leal observed with reference to his research in this matter "everybody, every department we contacted, was basically following the communicative approach ... even if they were teaching translation and grammar - the "in" word is communicative competence!" (Leal cited in Farquhar, McMeniman and Bundesen 1992, 27).

The theory of communicative competence viewed language as an instrument of social interaction that was "organised around *functions* to which it is put" with "an emphasis on meaning" (McMeniman 1995, 3). It is appropriate, therefore, to draw first on theory to demonstrate how communicative competence gained ascendancy as a strategy for language learning in Australia. Then selected theory is elucidated to demonstrate how communicative competence was frequently thwarted in practice.

This examination of theory is prefaced by the view that approaches to second language teaching in Australia have fluctuated as new theories emerged to influence practice. For example, an early focus in Australia was known as the "traditional approach" (McMeniman 1995, 2). This approach emphasised the mechanics of language, or grammar rules, with scant regard to the semantic needs of the learner and less emphasis on the situational or contextual aspects of language use. As the focus was on formal language systems, it was sometimes referred to as the rationalist approach (Farquhar 1992, 20). Students who learnt this way were "structurally competent but communicatively-incompetent" (ibid). The critique here is not to disregard the significance of the mechanics of language and grammar, but rather to demonstrate that the traditional approach concentrated on the formal aspects of language and translation

at the expense of speaking skills. The next approach, audio-lingualism, was thought to remedy this neglect of speaking skills. It built on behaviourist principles, and advocated repeated language drills and the rote learning of basic dialogues. The assumption was that intensive drilling, frequently in "language laboratories", would facilitate fluency. Although audio-lingualism "gave learners a decade of parroting other people's conversations, endless mechanical manipulation of gap- filling exercises", ironically, "after the patterns, drills and memorised dialogues were completed, students still seemed unable to communicate effectively" (McMeniman 1995, 2).

The current emphasis on "competence" came first from the work of Noam Chomsky (1959), who argued that language was acquired through each individual's innate cognitive processes. However, Chomsky emphasised the knowledge of language structure, such as linguistic or grammatical competence, over the use of language, or linguistic performance. Chomsky was not concerned with social factors. Rather, his emphasis was on the structure and rules ideal native-speakers would need in order to "produce the infinate number of grammatical sentences the human mind can generate" (McMeniman 1995, 2).

In response to Chomsky's emphasis, Halliday (1973) argued that linguistic theory, as applied to second language acquisition, was too concerned with the mechanics of language and that the focus should be on meaning and function. Halliday's work, and that of others, formed part of the sociolinguistic thesis, which viewed language as a tool for social interaction[1]. According to this view, as learners acquired language, they also built an understanding of the patterns of relationships between situations and the language that occured within them. That is, language skills were acquired along with the knowledge of the constraint of contextual variables. This was particularly significant, for such contextualised usage clarified the meaning of language, and it meant that along with a knowledge of grammar and context, the learner acquired a knowledge of how to use language to function in a social situation. As Hymes (1972a) put it, this was "an ability when to speak, when not, and ... what to talk about, with whom, when, where, and in what manner" (p. 227). In sociolinguistic theory, this ability was identified as communicative competence. Hence, sociolinguistic theorists added to Chomsky's work on linguistic competence a focus on the mediating factors of social and linguistic variables. Hymes (1971), for example, saw this knowledge of verbal and non-verbal codes, along with their reciprocal relationship, as an essential

part of language, which, in turn, was part of the "ethnography of symbolic forms" (p. 284).

Similarly, Farquhar (1992) endorsed this approach for its emphasis on the diversity of speech, which characterised the shift away from earlier rationalist (traditional) and behavioural (audio-lingual) approaches to language learning in Australia. But whereas Farquhar (1992) summed up the current emphasis on communicative competence as functional “with its basis in rhetoric and ethnography” (p. 20), there were different views as to what communicative competence meant in practice. Halliday (1985), for example, argued that communicative competence involved a compensatory shift back to "grammar and philosophy" (xviii), for his emphasis in sociolinguistic theory was on the functional use of language in communicative situations. While Hymes (1971) had focused on Chomsky's adaption of Saussurian theory[2], notably the emphasis on the social and systematic rules of language (*parole* in Saussurian terminology). As noted earlier, Chomsky's emphasis was on the importance of language structure, that is grammatical or linguistic competence, rather than the social context of use. Hymes (1971) disagreed with this interpretation, reversed the emphasis, and cited Sassure's notion of *parole* as "a residual realm of variation" (p. 273) and focused instead on real people, situations and actions[3]. Yet Halliday (1985) argued the case for functional grammar and the need for students to "crack the code" (p. xxxi) as the basis for second language competency.

Communicative competence in practice

Despite the work of such language theorists, it seems that communicative competence in Australia has been thwarted in practice, largely because of the misapprehension that the explicit study of grammar should be avoided or downplayed. Balet (1985) categorised four assumptions which undermined the translation of the theory of communicative competence into practice. First, was the assumption that a second language can be learnt most effectively as the mother tongue, that is by using real-life situations. The second assumption built upon the first by claiming that classroom activities should be "empirical" in nature and involve processes which are spontaneously creative. The third assumption was that the explicit study of the grammatical structure of the language should be discarded or kept to a minimum. Accordingly, grammar should only be taught if it was the means to make explicit

communicative intent. While the fourth assumption was that the notion of reality should be explored in the classroom in the form of authentic materials.

Yet as McMeniman's (1995) work noted, the original theoretical emphasis of communicative competence was upon grammar and function. Wilson (1995) took a different emphasis in his critique of the Rudd Report's endorsement of this approach. He suggested that communicative competence was problematical for Australian LOTE teachers because it was not originally developed to be used with school students. Wilson claimed that communicative competence was borrowed from Europe where it was employed with adult learners in intensive training sessions aimed at achieving high levels of proficiency. Such an adult-centred European context "could hardly be said to be the operating conditions of the average Australian classroom, but the expectations have remained the same. Reality, in terms of the *conditions of teaching and learning* was ignored in favour of utopian statements about what teachers and students would be able to achieve" (Wilson 1995, 109).

Wilson (1995) noted the significance of Bowden and Quinn's research for the Ingleson Report (see Ingleson 1989 Vol. 2, 165-167), which preceeded the Rudd Report, and claimed that it was "remarkable that their observations, and the work of Valdemar Marton which prompted their comments, have not been taken up by Australian language curriculum developers and syllabus writers" (Wilson 1995, 109). This was because Marton's (1988) work was relevant to the Australian LOTE context for its emphasis on the affective factors of learner type, age, class size, teachers' language skills and pedagogical proficiency. Wilson surmised that the constraining factors to second language proficiency in Australia such as socio-economic status, student gender, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, must be considered in curriculum design for "the real world of teaching and learning second languages in Australia" (Wilson 1995, 109-110).

These issues had implications for what the Rudd Report's policy prescription hoped to achieve.

> When communicative competence is poorly understood we are obviously not going to get very far even at the non-intellectual "skills" level. Without substantial intellectual content, any approach to language acquisition will remain superficial and prevent any real contact with the other society (Leal in Farquhar, McMeniman and Bundersen 1992, 30).

My critique of the Rudd Report's policy prescription for the priority languages rests on the view that a more sophisticated view of the learner and theories of metacognition in second language learning was warranted.

The learner's cognitive skills

McMeniman (1995) has argued that an improvement in second language teaching and learning would not take place in Australia unless five interrelated considerations about the learner's cognitive skills informed the practice of communicative competence. The first of these five features emphasised the need to understand how learners acquired a second language (L2). It was consistent with communicative methodology as it emphasised the contextualised and purposeful aspects of language use. That is, language was viewed as an instrument of social interaction, and was organised around the functions to which it was put. McMeniman (1995) suggests that these functions were "merely a way of organising content around the needs of the learner" (p.4).

The second feature emphasised the generative capacity of language. McMeniman (1995) claimed that the test of successful learning was "whether the learners can generate language for their own purposes - where the output from the students exceeds the input from the teacher or other instructional aids" (p. 4). The third feature emphasised a more critical approach to the intellectual engagement of the learner, for many LOTE teachers assumed that if students experienced greater exposure to a second language, they would automatically increase their language capacity and proficiency. McMeniman (1995) argued for the learners to be "actively involved in the process and, for L2 learners this requires regular, intensive and purposeful use of the target language" (p. 5).

The work of Brumfit (1978) informed the fourth feature which emphasised the need to reconcile the cognitive and communicative approaches, for language teaching was essentially concerned with enabling learners to employ a system for their own purposes, namely social interaction. "Communication will be achieved through the skill of the teacher in linking the grammar to the situations, functions and notions appropriate, by means of methodological principles adopted. If we need communication, we need a grammatical-functional syllabus" (Brumfit 1978, 79-82).

The final feature emphasised metacognition, that is, "teaching learners how to learn" (McMeniman 1995, 4). For it was "only when educators understand what learners do during learning, can they devise adequate and appropriate curricula responses for learners" (ibid, 5). As Weinstein and Mayer (1986) put it, in general educational terms learning strategies, those "behaviours and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning" (p. 315) affect each learner's capacity to learn. These "mental tactics" (Derry and Murphy 1986, 2) facilitate an individual's "acquisition of knowledge of skill" (ibid). McMeniman (1995) stressed that the challenge language teachers faced was how to make explicit such mental tactics, that is, to teach students to become "strategic in their own learning" (p. 6).

Such interrelated considerations pertain to specific learning strategies which foster the learner's ability to think in a second language. I argue that this latter ability was what the Rudd Report's policy prescription aimed to achieve. However, the Report's one-dimensional rationale together with the overriding emphasis on proficiency outcomes, meant that the processes which nurtured and facilitated the ability to think in a second language, were overlooked by the Working Group and not factored into the Report. And it is in this sense the Report's human capital view of students determined the "means" which did not fully support the "ends" for the priority languages[4].

As Yang (1988) and McMeniman (1995) have argued, metacognitive strategies which stress the cognitive view of the learner, are relevant for success in second language teaching and learning. Briefly, there are two ways in which metacognitive strategies are pertinent. First, these strategies make explicit the intellectual skills involved in the nature of each learning task. Second, metacognitive approaches stress the importance of drawing the learner's attention to how these skills can be mastered and applied in order to acquire new knowledge, that is, the learner's ability to acquire the second language being studied[5].

In sum, metacognitive approaches reinforce the intentional nature of learning for they involve "effort directed toward cognitive goals over and above effort directed toward task performance" (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1992, 526). Moreover, it has been claimed that such approaches are germane to acquiring the "linguistic and cultural code" (McMeniman 1995, 6) of a second language[6]. However, it is argued here that Report's

preoccupation with proficiency outcomes prevented an examination of the causal factors which contribute to effective second language learning, and by extension, greater fluency and proficiency in second languages.

Second language acquisition

The following part of this paper explores the assumptions the Rudd Report made about second language acquisition and contends that COAG's objective to prioritise Asian languages was not informed by theories of second language acquisition.

The analysis here rests on the view that COAG's objective to prioritise Asian languages as a matter of national significance was utilitarian and not informed by theories of second language learning. Moreover, the assumption that increasing numbers of Australian students would become proficient in Asian languages, and that this would enhance the economic outcomes of Asian engagement, ignored the existing difficulties facing second language teachers as well as the debates about why and how second languages should be taught in Australian schools[7].

It might be argued that COAG's failure to consider the contested nature of second language teaching, at the theoretical and practical level, had implications for the achievement of Asian language proficiency. On the one hand, it risked perpetuating the existing difficulties facing language teachers in Australia. Yet on the other, it can be argued that it was appropriate to commission a high level Working Group to determine which Asian languages should be prioritised together with the proficiency levels to be achieved, for the prescription of the outcome would ensure that LOTE teachers would work to achieve it.

Three assumptions underpinned the COAG brief for Asian language provision. The first assumption was that existing practice could facilitate Asian language development. The second assumption related to the human capital view of language education. Put simply, Asian language learning was prioritised for its supposed capacity to enhance Australia's economic interests. Connected to this was the third assumption. This was the instrumentalist view, that languages could be separated from the humanities and consisted simply of deployable skills. Collectively, these views presupposed that

"productive knowledge" in the form of Asian language proficiency, would successfully equip a cohort of Australian students to further the nation's interests in the Asian region. Each of these assumptions is examined below.

Reliance on current practice

As noted earlier, in theory communicative competence had two prime thrusts (Richards, Platt and Weber 1985, 49). First, it involved a knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of the language being studied. Second, it involved a knowledge of the appropriate rules of speaking for the use of everyday language. Essentially, this meant how to use language in a functionally appropriate way. At this level of analysis, the latter characteristic would appear to fit well with the economism of the COAG brief and with the overriding paradigm that an Asian languages and cultures strategy could create an export culture, which would, in turn, facilitate Australia's Asian engagement.

However, the theory of communicative competence was fraught with difficulties because of the significant misconceptions which distorted its implementation in Australia. For example, while some teachers used "fluency, function, communication, competence and language use" (McMeniman cited in Farquhar, McMeniman and Bundersen 1992, 27) - the communicative/functional approach - many teachers did not also emphasise "accuracy, form, structure, grammar or linguistic competence" (ibid) - the structural/grammatical approach. This was because the latter was seen as too academic whilst the former was considered the best means to facilitate the emphasis on practical language proficiency in Asian languages. Moreover, this emphasis on practicality was reinforced by another popular assumption amongst Australian LOTE teachers. This was that second language proficiency was most effectively learnt as a mother tongue with strategies that focused on real life situations and authentic materials. The problem with this strategy was that it often overlooked the cognitive skills of the students.

Significantly, this "artificial and incorrect polarisation" (ibid) was exacerbated by the government's push for Asian engagement which was made explicit with the release of the 1988 White Paper[8] on Higher Education (Dawkins 1988a). For while the "lofty claims" (McMeniman 1995, 1) of policy documents that the acquisition of Asian languages would lead to more job opportunities and contribute to Australia's economic

success in Asia were a "matter of some contention" (ibid), the high level endorsement of these claims meant that practitioners would not question "or speak out against a doctrine that has been decreed" (ibid). As Leal (cited in Farquhar, McMeniman and Bundersen 1992) observed

> a whole group of academics has been caught by surprise at the recent public endorsement of the practical importance of languages ... they are reluctant to question the approach since they may be seen as bypassing the opportunity to promote languages (p. 27).

The fear was that the communicative approach would reinforce the view of language as a skill "devoid of intellectual content" (McMeniman cited in Farquhar, McMeniman and Bundersen 1992, 29) which seemed to be driving the national government's push for Asian language expertise. In addition, there were longstanding debates in Australia about the significance of the ideological purposes of learning languages, and debates about which Asian languages should be taught (Carrell *et.al.*, 1989, Clyne 1991a, Kirkpatrick 1995b, McMeniman 1995, Slattery 2001).

It seems that some of the assumptions and practices about the communicative competence approach to second language teaching prompted LOTE practice to be “falsely dichotomised” (McMeniman 1995, 2) between the structural/grammatical approach and the communicative/functional approach in Australia at the time of the Rudd Report's commission. And this had implications for the quality of second language instruction. As noted, the cause of this problem was that the communicative approach was "not informed by theories of learning" in Australia (McMeniman cited in Farquhar, McMeniman and Bundersen 1992, 27). The COAG brief, and the Rudd Report, did not address this issue. Moreover, it has been argued that theories of metacognition should inform second language teaching so that students could understand "the sorts of strategies they can use to learn a second language" (ibid: 27-28).

The human capital view

COAG's "unapologetically economic" (Rudd 1995, 39) terms of reference for the Working Group assumed a human capital view of students. That is, students would be co-opted to learn Asian languages in the national interest. The view that education has a direct relationship to the economy, and that policy prescription can harness this

relationship to increase economic goals, builds on human capital theory. This theory linked the notion of education as consumption and the view of education as a form of investment.

First evident during the 1960s, human capital theory resurfaced with the predominance of the state response to market forces in Australia and it assumed an economic rationalist model of human behaviour. For example, in 1988, the Federal Minister for Education, John Dawkins, delivered an OECD speech in which he made specific reference to the renewed interest in human capital theory as a micro-economic theory for structural reform. Dawkins suggested that this was due to the "heightened recognition of the limits of macro-economic policies to deal with the economic problems" (Dawkins 1988b, 1).

Marginson (1989a) claimed that four assumptions underpinned the theory of human capital. First, individuals were seen as rational players who acted to enhance their personal economic utility. Second, the benefits of education were considered to be primarily economic in that all benefits were reduced to either consumption benefits or investment benefits. Third, the benefits of education were considered in terms of what an individual acquired. Fourth, the social benefits of education were considered to be no more than the sum of the individual parts. Critics of the application of this theory to the processes of economic restructuring in Australia argued that there was scant research to support its relevance to education policy making (Porter 1993a & 1993b Maglen 1988; Marginson 1989b & 1993). For example, Yeatman (1990) derided the "unrestrained economism" of human capital discourse in the national government's metapolicy reforms for its ability to "delegitimise social, cultural and moral claims" (p. 102).

As foreshadowed, apart from an acknowledgment of the time needed to master an Asian language, the Rudd Report ignored cognitive views about how Australian students might acquire second languages and focused instead upon the outcome of language proficiency. It could be argued that this concern with proficiency was also a response to the unsatisfactory levels of speaking and reading skills in LOTES which decades of second language teaching in Australia had been unable to remedy. In this sense, the policy solution of prescribing the outcome and leaving the process to LOTE teachers might appear to be an effective means of achieving the outcome of proficiency. Indeed,

the Report would emphasise the paramount goal of “proficiency development” (Rudd 1994, 90) with the blunt *caveat* that

> the teaching profession will have to move in its perception of second languages as academic "subjects" to a more global view of second languages education as continuous skills development (ibid).

In this sense, the Rudd Report's policy prescription for priority Asian languages charted new territory for Australian LOTE teachers.

Yet there were two significant and related problems with such one-dimensional economism. First, as noted earlier, the exhortation to remove the notion of second language learning from its intellectual well-spring as an academic discipline risked reducing language learning to a skill devoid of intellectual content. The second point related to COAG's assumption that certain forms of knowledge facilitated success. That is, there was no empirical evidence from the Australian context to support the notion that proficiency in Asian languages would ensure that effective communication took place.

Moreover, the issue of proficiency targets and the development of second language skills in Asian languages through communicative competence was subject to debate in Australia. First, the notion of proficiency as a realistic and valid goal was contested. Second, it was argued that Australian teachers were not themselves sufficiently proficient in Asian languages, and that there were simply not enough LOTE teachers available to implement the Rudd Report's proficiency goals.

With reference to the first factor, academics such as Ingram and Wylie (1992) stressed there was an important distinction between language proficiency which refers to "a learner's ability to mobilise the language in order to carry out language tasks" (p. 31) and communicative competence, which can be used "rigorously in ways that differ little from language proficiency and loosely to mean the ability to communicate" (ibid). Yet Ingram and Wylie (1992) argued that it was possible to test for language proficiency.

However, others regarded language proficiency as an artificial construct. For example, see Vollmer (1981), Canale and Swain (1980), and Bachman (1988). Griffin *et al.* (1988) emphasised the distinction between course-dependent performance from general

proficiency. The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR) were derived from this latter view. Proficiency in ASLPR terms entailed "both the ability to carry out language tasks and some notion of how they are carried out" (Ingram and Wylie 1992, 33).

Moreover, with reference to the second aspect of the debate, the issue of proficiency in Asian languages was especially contested and the feasibility of prescribing proficiency levels in the Asian languages subsequently prioritised by the Rudd Report was debated. For example, Wilson (1995) claimed that the first level of adequate proficiency, ASLPR 3, took longer for Asian languages. Moreover, he claimed that this was exacerbated by the fact that "postgraduate professional studies for Asian language teachers are still largely underdeveloped" (Wilson 1995, 102) and that there were not enough properly trained Asian language teachers "who are both proficient in the language and the culture and with adequate pedagogical skills" (ibid: 101) to develop proficiency in the target Asian languages at the school level. Wilson (1995) emphasised that as the "record to date in Australian schools" (p. 101) was not good, the Rudd Report's ambitious proficiency goals may not be realised.

Also, there was no evidence to support COAG's assumption that effective communication led to increased exports. As Sollenberger (1978) put it a person's "so-called language proficiency" (p. 8) might be accurate in terms of technical skill, however this does not ensure "effectiveness in communication" (ibid). He argued that

> (i)n some cases, it may have enabled the person to misrepresent or foul up more effectively ... we all know people who talk nonsense fluently. On the other hand I know people who butcher the language, whose accents are atrocious and whose vocabularies are limited. For these reasons we give them a low proficiency rating. Yet, for some reason, some of them are effective communicators (Sollenberger 1978, 8).

Similarly, Ingram and Wylie (1992) observed that while communicative competence might appear to be a desirable target for language teaching in theory, in practice it presented great difficulties for language testing. This was because the ability to communicate entailed

> much more than linguistic competence (knowledge of the formal systems that underlie a language) and language proficiency (the ability to use linguistic and other competencies in order to carry out language tasks) and includes personality factors ... intelligence, the ability to organise and

> present ideas logically and comprehensibly, education, social norms, and the willingness of the interlocutor to accommodate a learner's non-standard language forms (Ingram and Wylie 1992, 31-32).

Moreover, at the time of the COAG commission there were no nationally agreed standards for measuring proficiency outcomes in Australia.

The instrumental view

The third assumption implicit in the COAG brief was an extension of its human capital view of language acquisition. This was the instrumental view, that languages could be separated from the humanities and consisted of deployable skills. This notion reflected the broader government agenda to build a knowledge-based economy which would enhance Australia's economic interests in Asia.

However, as Frow (1990) observed with reference to the Dawkins reforms to higher education in 1988 that established the foundations for the Australian education system to be harnessed to the nation's economic needs, this policy initiative was problematic for it separated the development of skills from the processes of learning. This was because training and skill development involved the application of existing knowledges, whereas learning was a process which involved intellectual processes which engaged existing knowledges to create new knowledges. As Frow (1990) put it

> (c)learly skills formation is valuable in its own right, and the government is correct to pursue the reskilling of the workforce as a primary objective. The problem lies only in its attempt to superimpose the model of training on a system of learning. The effect of its instrumental view of knowledge has been to favour the production of applied knowledges, and to devalue those knowledges which do not contribute directly to Gross National Product (p. 362).

I argue that COAG's instrumentalist objectives negated the intellectual and cultural aspects of language learning. In turn, this emphasis limited the potential for students to learn and use a second language effectively. Ironically, this perception that language learning should be separate from its humanities base - the "languages/culture divide" (McMeniman cited in Farquhar, McMeniman and Bundersen 1992, 29), was rejected by Hymes (1972a)[9], a key advocate for communicative competence. Moreover, the assumption that language and culture could be separated, was at odds with the core rationale for the teaching of languages.

Advocates of second language learning claim that one of its greatest assets is the ability to learn about another culture. This generic argument was based on the Whorfian hypothesis about the relationship between language and culture, and on the work of Edward Sapir (1933/1949). Whorf (1956) viewed language as a determinant of meaning rather than as a tool through which meanings were created[10]. His work pointed to a causal link between language and the perception of culture. Conversely, Sapir's (1933/ 1949) view was that language was a tool, rather than a determinant of ideas. He claimed that it was possible for individuals from different cultures to create and share meaning once they had found the strategies through which they could partake of that world. Put simply, Sapir's position advocated language as a tool for enquiring into another culture, rather than a determinant of it.

> (L)anguage is an essentially perfect means of expression and communication among every known people ... The content of every culture is expressible in its language ... Meaning is not just a quality of expression but a projection of potential meanings into the raw material of experience ... Language has the power to create that world of the potential integrating with the actual which enables human beings to transcend the immediately given ... and to join in a larger common understanding ... This common understanding constitutes culture (Saphir, quoted in Fox 1992, 62).

Of course, these debates are part of much wider intellectual debates on language and have been explored at the metatheoretical level by Wittgenstein (1973), Habermas (1968/1987) and Chomsky (1965). McMeniman (1995) has argued that language has the unique ability to externalise thought and that knowledge of another language enabled access to the minds and worlds of others.

> Although one can "know about" a culture, one cannot "know" it in the real sense without "knowing" its language. Language is the most overt manifestation of a culture, and, in the opinion of some, when a language dies, a world dies. This capacity to think beyond one's own experience and to enter the heads of others through language is viewed as one of the critical skills of the future. Indeed, Passmore (1985) has called this capability "sympathetic imagination" - that is, understanding how other people are feeling, what they are thinking, why they act as they do, and how they conceptualise the world (p. 9)[11].

It might be argued that this latter quality - the capacity to develop a "sympathetic imagination" - was the basis for Asia literacy. However, this paper argues that because the Working Group assumed that its policy prescription would best serve the national

interest if the focus on Asian languages concentrated on proficiency outcomes, it operated within the limitations of its economist brief. The final part of this paper explores the Report's policy prescription for a national Asian languages and cultures strategy and critiques its emphasis on second language provision.

The Report's recommendations

The Report recommended that four priority Asian languages, selected for their economic significance to Australia, and studied through a school-based program, form the thrust of an Asian languages/cultures initiative in the Australian education system[12]. The Report endorsed the Commonwealth's 1991 White Paper targets that 25% of Year 12 students should study a second language, however, it recommended that the target date be extended from 2000 to 2006. Significantly, the Report recommended that 15% of Year 12 students should study a priority Asian language while the remaining 10% study other languages by this date. Further, it was recommended that 60% of Year 10 students should study a priority Asian language by 2006.

The Report suggested that Education Ministers develop proficiency scales, testing and reporting mechanisms for the four priority Asian languages and that specific targets be established for a school based national program. Further, it recommended that Asian cultures courses be developed within the Key Learning Area of Studies of Society and Environment, and that proficiency outcomes which reflect appropriate learning in this area be determined by the beginning of the 1996 school year. Notable in the Report's recommendations was that second language learning be mandated during the compulsory years of schooling and that Year 3 be considered as the most appropriate starting age for studying a second language. The Report also tackled the number of hours required for second language proficiency, and stipulated that 2.5 hours of instruction per week for each year of study was required for Years 3 to 10, and that 3 hours per week was necessary for Years 11 and 12.

It was suggested that a minimum national standard for Asian language teachers be developed to ascertain levels of proficiency and that a strategy to ensure the required number of appropriately proficient Asian language teachers be established. The Report also recommended that curriculum statements and frameworks for the priority languages be established and that teaching materials be developed for Asian languages and cultures education. The impact of projected higher Asian languages/cultures proficiency outcomes on TAFE and university courses was considered and the Report recommended that a high level working group from the relevant authorities investigate the implications for course offerings.

Three broad programs were recommended as the implementation machinery for the Report's policy priorities. The first was a school-based program to cover Year 3-10 and Years 11-12 languages and cultures programs. First titled, the Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (ALSAS) program, it would become known as the National Asian Languages and Studies (NALSAS) strategy during the first term of its implementation. The second program was concerned with a smaller number of schools and focused on an Asian Language Immersion (ASI) program. The third program dealt with an optional Year 13 course, offered on a scholarship basis, to facilitate “in country” language study before further tertiary study.

Of course, such broad-ranging and long-term national programs for Asian languages and cultures education required extensive funding and the Report was explicit in how this was to be achieved. It presented details of costing for the period from 1995 to 2006 and recommended that each year a 50% contribution from the Commonwealth be matched by a 50% contribution from the States.

Second language provision

The Rudd Report was explicit that its push for an export culture be framed in terms of second language provision.

> While the focus of the report is on Asian languages/cultures education as a means of enhancing Australia's economic and export interests, it is recognised that a strategy for an enhanced effort in this area must be framed in the context of overall second language provision in Australia (Rudd 1994, 4).

The Report claimed that its case for second language provision was qualified by the emphases of successive reports, notably the Commonwealth 1991 White Paper. The standpoint here is that the Report was at pains to demonstrate that its recommendations were explicitly linked to previous federal government initiatives in language education. As indicated earlier, the White Paper advocated that 25% of Year 12 students should study a language other than English by the year 2000. However, the magnitude of the Report's policy task was acknowledged for "in 1992 only 12.5% of Year 12 students were studying a second language" (Rudd 1994, iii) and "(s)ignificantly, less than 4% of Year 12 students today are studying an Asian language" (ibid).

Essentially, the Rudd Report wanted to reverse this trend and expand the learning of LOTE. The radical part of the Report's policy prescription was its advocacy that Australian students from Year 3 to Year 10 should learn a second language. Moreover,

the Report recommended that 60% of these students learn one of the four priority Asian languages identified from the statistical data provided by the East Asia Analytical Unit. Concomitantly, while the Report's strategy took heed of the White Paper's (1991) goals, it extended the latter's deadline and its target languages. Hence the Rudd Report's push was for 25% of Year 12 students to learn a second language by the year 2006, and that of these students, 15% should study one of the four priority Asian languages.

Three broad programs were set out to give effect to the Report's policy recommendations for the priority Asian languages deemed of "greatest economic significance to Australia" (Rudd 1994, iii). These were the Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (ALSAS) program, the Asian Language Immersion program (ALI), and the Young Australians in Asia Program (YAA)[13].

The Report's emphasis on second language provision advocated a "dual or multi-disciplinary model" (Rudd 1994, 74) of training. This meant that the Report eschewed the notion of a highly specialised Asianist expertise, for while making a contribution in an academic capacity, such an elite “did not become part of the mainstream public and private sector employment” (Rudd 1994, 74). Rather, the human capital paradigm was paramount, and the Report followed the dual model approach first advocated by the *National Strategy* (Asian Studies Council 1988), and then endorsed by Garnaut (1989) and Leal (1991), for Australia needed “to integrate Asian languages/cultures skills with other professional and occupational skills of the workforce” (Rudd 1994, 77). As one member of the Working Group observed there was

> a very clear understanding and a very clear statement in the Report that language skills are an adjunct to skills in areas of professional pursuit. There is no suggestion that the Report aims to turn out academic linguists. What the Report does aim to turn out is young Australians with varying levels of language proficiency in a range of languages - some of which will be the four priority Asian languages (Langdon 1995, 9).

The selection of priority languages

The selection of four priority Asian languages was based on the analysis of quantitative models of Australia's most significant export markets over a future twenty year period, provided by the East Asia Analytical Unit in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This drew both praise and blame for the Report's language strategy. Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, (Bahasa) Indonesian and Korean were perceived to be the languages of "the economies and markets which will be critical to Australia's trade performance over the next twenty years" (Rudd 1994, 16). While some reviewers (Roberts 1994)[14] applauded the practical outcomes of recognising the long term benefits of Asian

languages to Australia's economic future, others tried to debunk the methodology of this decision. Critics of the Rudd Report took issue with the fact that such languages were chosen on the strength of Australia's projected market share in Asia "as a lemming-like response to a national anxiety" (Slattery 1995,11).

Although the Report's policy prescription prioritised Asian languages by stipulating that 15% of Year 12 students should study one of the four target languages by 2006, its endorsement and extension of the Commonwealth's White Paper targets provided for an increase in other languages. As with Queensland's Braddy Statement (1991), the Report's Asian languages goals did not detract from the enrolment figures for European languages. Recommendation 5B suggested that governments "agree that the remaining 10% of the Year 12 target be met by studying other languages (up from the present figure of 8%)" (Rudd 1994, x).

I argue that this was a strategic move designed to steer the accent on priority Asian languages in the Report past attempts to politicise and undermine it. Significantly, the Report did not try to evaluate the relative merits of studying European as opposed to Asian languages. It acknowledged that there was

> a rationale, in part economic but principally cultural, for the continued teaching of certain European languages in the overall language programs of Australian schools. The report neither seeks to challenge this rationale nor to defend it. Rather, the working group's terms of reference makes clear that it is required to focus exclusively on developing a strategy for the implementation of comprehensive Asian languages and cultures education in Australian schools - not to debate the relative merits of "Asian" versus "European" (Rudd 1994, 4).

As one reviewer candidly observed

> (e)ducation authorities regard the European languages traditionally taught here as being of little practical benefit - either to the economy or to students - but they will remain available (Roberts 1994, 21).

As well, the context of second language provision provided the sort of inclusiveness that the Braddy Statement (1991) prescribed for Queensland's LOTE policy. Plainly, this was an attempt to take the heat out of the old debates from European and ethnic groups who saw their vested interests at risk. The Report's advocacy of second language learning expansion in Australia meant that

> these policy goals will not detract from the numbers of students currently studying the more traditional European languages. Neither ought they reduce the availability of what are usually referred to as community languages, which are supported by various ethnic groups in Australia and

> which have usually been tied to the broader goals of multiculturalism (Lingard 1994, 6).

Moreover, the Rudd Report was explicit about what it did not do.

> First, the report does not seek to analyse the impact of an expanded Asian languages and cultures program in our schools on the further development of an Australian multicultural society ... multiculturalism ... has a number of additional objectives which plainly go beyond the scope of this report (Rudd 1994, 4).

This was an attempt to avoid past divisive debates about language priorities, when ethnic groups lobbied under the guise of multiculturalism to push for community languages above Asian languages. Of course, it must be noted that community language advocates had strong educational reasons for pursuing the teaching of these languages in schools as linguistic and cultural maintenance were crucial to the development of literacy skills in young students. However, the Working Group was at pains to defuse recurring debate. Moreover, the Report also made clear that the government had the power and authority to make language policy in the national interest. As the Manager of LACU in Queensland and member of the COAG Working Party, Allan Langdon put it:

> (t)he Rudd Report is essentially arguing that a second language is the right of every Australian and that it is the responsibility of the education system to see to it that this is delivered. It is also arguing that government has a major role in determining which languages are of greatest importance to Australia as a nation (Langdon 1995, 9).

Chapter Five of the Report emphasised observable outcomes generic to the major education reports of this period. Here specific targets and deadlines were set and linked to the Report's goal of an Asia-literate Australian society[15]. The Working Group assumed

> that setting integrated quantitative and qualitative targets for both languages and cultures outcomes will in time produce the necessary "layering" of expertise ... ranging from a broad base of general understanding of the region to narrower groups of more refined expertise equipped for the "sharp edge" of Australia's future economic engagement with the region (Rudd 1994, 110).

This emphasis in the Report would later be dismissed as "social engineering" by one of its critics (Slattery 1996, 13).

While the Report acknowledged that the "use of proficiency as an indicator of program outcomes is the subject of considerable debate amongst educationalists and linguists"

(Rudd 1994, 107), it nevertheless recommended that this contested issue be addressed. The Working Group's assumption that a schools-based program must be measured in quantative and qualitative terms was made a recommendation in the final Report (Recommendation 5C)[16]. However, because the two options[17] available for this task were not commonly accepted across the States and Territories as suitable for proficiency assessment at the school level, the Working Group recommended that a new set of generic descriptors be developed. It was argued that such proficiency scales or levels could be "used to describe proficiency attained by students" (Rudd 1994, 107). This was also addressed in Recommendation 5C[18].

The prioritising of languages over cultures

The Report attempted to match Asian languages proficiency outcomes with the "complementary courses in Asian cultures" (ibid, 109). The Working Group assumed that the treatment of Asian cultures across the disciplines and integrated studies would

> equip the next generation of Australians with a knowledge of the internal diversity of the region and to displace the inaccurate perceptions of the past of some sort of homogeneous 'Asian' monolith (Rudd 1994, 110).

Whilst the Report acknowledged that proficiency outcomes would vary according to the circumstances of such study, it recommended that the variant outcomes would range from a sound knowledge of regional cultures for Year 10 students to a high/very high level of knowledge for Year 12 students. The problem with this last recommendation was that it was cast in the context of second language provision, and not in its own right.

Although the Report acknowledged that

> (t)he study of Asian languages in the absence of a parallel investment in Asian studies (ie. the study of Asian societies as an integrated part of the regular subject-based curriculum in schools) would not be productive in terms of achieving a creative export culture (Rudd 1994, 55),

it did not afford cultures equal emphasis in the Report. Rather, the Report's central assumption that its policy prescription should be set in the context of overall second language provision drove the allocation of resources. In plain terms, this meant that Asian studies would be the "poor relation" in the implementation process. According to Wilson (1995), the long term impact of the Report's strategy would result in

> the rather paltry amount, of some A$32.0 million, for Asian studies apart from languages, especially when viewed against the total of $1442.2

> million, over the period 1995-2000. There is no provision thereafter for Asian studies while language provision continues to receive funding of well over A$100.0 million per annum until 2006 (p. 112).

However, it could be argued that the Working group prioritised language provision over Asian studies as it was easier, or more practical, to 'add' a language to a curriculum and more difficult to prioritise a culture.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the Rudd Report assumed productive knowledge in the form of Asian language proficiency would successfully equip Australians to engage in the region. This paradigm drew upon the human capital notion of language education and presupposed that languages could be separated from the humanities and consisted of deployable skills. The Report also assumed that current practice could facilitate language skills in the four priority Asian languages.

However, the theory of communicative competence which informed existing pedagogy for LOTE teaching in Australia, was fraught with difficulties because of the significant misconceptions which distorted its implementation in practice. McMeniman (1995, 2) has referred to the "falsely dichotomised" use of communicative competence, for some LOTE teachers emphasised the communicative/functional approach, whilst others employed the grammatical/structural approach. At the time of the COAG commission, the most widely used method in Australia emphasised the "practicality" of the communicative/functional approach and neglected the grammatical/structural emphasis of the other.

McMeniman's (1995) work had been important in critiquing the incorrect dichotomising of the theory of communicative competence in practice, and in explicating the erroneous assumptions of those views of language learning which emphasise skills without intellectual content. Her emphasis on the need to use theories of metacognition to elucidate those intellectual strategies necessary for the acquisition of a second language informed the first part of this paper. Essentially, theories of learning must be applied to the pedagogy of second language acquisition.

Nevertheless, the Rudd Report was silent on pedagogy. In emphasising the goal of "proficiency development" (Rudd 1994, 90) the Report confidently asserted that language teachers would have to alter their perception of second languages "as academic 'subjects' to a more global view of second languages education as continuous skill development" (ibid). This was a "crash" or "crash through" approach to policy

prescription for second language acquisition. Rudd set the targets for language proficiency, ignored the welter of evidence which indicated that there were significant pedagogical problems with LOTE teaching in Australia, and left the actual method of reaching the targets to the teaching profession. In the light of such empirical and theoretical evidence, Rudd's method of policy making seemed to separate policy goals from their social context, and provide fertile ground for those opposed to prioritising Asian languages in the Australian education system.

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[1]See the work of Hymes (1971; 1972a; 1972b); Gumperz (1972); Fishman (1972); and Ervin-Tripp (1973).

[2]Saussure's seminal work was *Course in General Linguistics* (1916/1974). His thesis was that everyday language consisted of a discrete system, the units of which were identifiable only by their relationships with each other, and not by reference to any other linguistic or extra-linguistic system. Saussure distinguished between the social and systematic rules of language (*langue*) and the individual and particular instance of speech or utterance (*parole*). He insisted that only the *langue* could be the appropriate object of scientific study, and that it was a social and essential phenomena. From this position, Saussure drew distinctions between institutions and events and subsequently developed the paradigm for his theory of structuralism. The latter, of course, referred to an approach to the study of human culture based upon the search for constraining patterns, or structures. According to the structuralist paradigm, individual phenomena had significance only when they were related to other phenomena as elements within an organised structure.

[3]Although Halliday (1985) was also critical of the Saussurian obsession with system and structure "at the expense of the text" (p. xxii) he declared that he followed Saussure in "his understanding of the relationship between the system of a language and its instantiation in acts of speaking" (ibid).

[4]The Report was explicit that proficiency development should be the "major target" (Rudd 1994, 90) of a second language program. Moreover, the Report assumed that "time on task" (ibid, 91) for language study would directly contribute to student proficiency and observed that "(n)ationally very few school based language programs have proficiency as an outcome target" (p. 87). However, the Report failed to link the significance of the learner's cognitive engagement in language learning with the development of proficiency skills.

[5] See Corbeil cited in McMeniman (1995, 6).

[6]Several studies support McMeniman's (1995) view. For example, see Chamot and O'Malley (1987), and O'Malley *et al.* (1985) classification of the strategies used by effective second language learners. See Polizer and McGroarty's (1985) analysis of how effective learning techniques differ in various L2 learning contexts. While Koda (1993) claimed that L2 learners must experience teaching which goes "beyond linguistic knowledge" (p. 497). His point was that L2 learners benefit from "cognitive strategy instruction, and from corresponding exercises designed to help them improve their use of linguistic knowledge during reading comprehension" (ibid).

[7]Language teaching in Australia, as with Asian studies, was contested largely because of the vested interests at stake. See Clyne 1991a and more recently, Slattery 2001.

[8]In July 1988, the Australian Government's Department of Employment, Education and Training released a White Paper on Higher Education. This policy outlined significant changes to the funding, structure and management of Australia's higher education system. In particular, the White Paper advocated the expansion of the system and prioritising areas of learning most relevant to knowledge-based and value-added production, such as computer and information sciences, business studies, economics and engineering. Critics of the White Paper argued that it downplayed the significance of the humanities, yet singled out the significance of Asian languages for their potential to contribute to the nation's trade and economic ties with Asia. The policy statement *Strengthening Australia's Schools* (Dawkins 1988c), claimed that the general strengthening of the school system was a key element in the overall restructuring of the Australian economy and a core component of the reforms in higher education and training.

[9]Hymes endorsed the notion of communicative competence because he was critical of the (then) prevalent linguisitc theoretical emphasis which failed "to provide an explicit place for sociocultural features" and, accordingly failed to "emphasise the competent usage of language" (Hymes 1972a, 272). Similarly, while Farquhar (1992) did not adopt the cognitive view of the student, she emphasised the sociocultural component as essential for the intellectual basis of second language learning. She argued that "(r)efusal to come to terms with the relationship between language and culture also closes the door on the whole thrust of the theory of communicative competence" (Farquhar 1992, 21).

[10]Whorf claimed that reality, thought and language varied according to culture. This emphasis on the nature of cultural determinants rather than the nature of language systems, derived from Whorf's research

on the Pueblo Indians (see Carroll ed., 1956). Fox (1992) claimed that the Whorfian hypothesis was "the ultimate justification for cultural relativity, and has been revived recently in the poststructural critique of positivism" (p. 61).

[11]Leal (cited in Farquhar, McMeniman and Bundersen 1992) supported this view and maintained that "(t)he culture of a society is contained most profoundly in its religion and its language. And access to its religion is at least partially through its language. Consequently, although cultural sensitivity at a superficial level is possible without linguistic competence, the language is clearly necessary for an understanding of the culture" (p. 29).

[12] See Rudd (1994, 44).

[13]ALSAS consisted of a school-based core program from Years 3-10 and an extension program in Years 11-12. The primary to secondary core program provided an average of 2.5 hours per week of second language instruction, while the upper secondary allocation was for 3 hours of instruction. Eight sub-programs that dealt with teacher supply and curriculum resources were detailed in the Report. The Asian Language Immersion program, intended for a limited number of primary and secondary schools, provided for the target language to be the means of instruction. While an optional Year 13 program, offered on a limited scholarship basis to outstanding Year 12 graduates, was the focus of the Young Australians in Asia program. Under this program, select priority language students would spend a year in the relevant Asian country before continuing their tertiary studies in Australia.

[14]For example *The Bulletin's* education reporter noted that "(t)he growing importance of Asia to the Australian economy is beyond dispute ... The Rudd Report says the relative increases in Asian per capita incomes mean demand for Australian goods and services will increase more rapidly than from elsewhere. The states have now agreed that language skills will play a key role in meeting that demand. Students under the new plan will be encouraged to learn four Asian languages" (Roberts 1994, 21).

[15]The Report advocated that COAG endorse its proficiency targets for the priority Asian languages in Recommendation 5D. These specific observable outcomes covered a range of attainments. For example, Year 10 students were to acquire at least a "survival proficiency" level; 13% of Year 12 students were to reach a "minimum social proficiency" level; 2 % of Year 12 students were to acquire a "minimum vocational proficiency" level while 1% of Year 12 students were to acquire a "useful vocational proficiency" level. Moreover it was recommended that this matter be promptly addressed. Recommendation 5D concluded that "Heads of Government agree that the specification of these proficiency levels be completed by the beginning of the 1996 school year" (ibid 111).

[16]Qualitative terms were detailed in the Report as "the knowledge, skills and understandings acquired through the learning of a second language and the individual's ability to use that target language effectively and in culturally appropriate ways" (ibid, 106). It was claimed that such qualitative achievements "must be assessed, recorded and reported in a way that is useful to students, teachers, parents and employers" (ibid).

[17]These were the LOTE Profile for Australian schools and a version of the Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating Scales (ASLPR).

[18]This part of the Recommendation advocated that: "COAG requests Education Ministers develop agreed proficiency scales, testing and reporting mechanisms for the four priority Asian languages to be included in the proposed national Asian languages/cultures program; COAG agrees to the finalisation of these proficiency scales, testing and reporting mechanisms by early 1995 to allow: trialing during 1995; and implementation at the beginning of the 1996 school year; Education Ministers be requested to report on progress to the second COAG of 1995" (op. cit. 108).

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